



Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

Testimony before the Connecticut Legislature Joint Committee on Education

Re: Hearing on an Act Concerning the Strengthening of School Bullying Laws (Senate Bill 1138),
Testimony Provided by Liane Roseman, GLSEN Connecticut Co-Chair

March 11, 2010

Good afternoon Senator Stillman, Representative Fleischmann and members of the Committee. My name is Liane Roseman. I am testifying today as the mother of children in grades 4 and 8, as a Co-Chair of GLSEN Connecticut, a Chapter of the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and also as a straight ally. GLSEN is a national education organization focused on creating safer schools for all students regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity/expression.

GLSEN supports strong and comprehensive anti-bullying and harassment protections to ensure students can learn in a safe and respectful environment, and we recognize that the Legislature shares our desire to protect marginalized and vulnerable students. Therefore, we suggest that the definition of bullying should include enumeration that makes it explicitly clear that students should be protected from bullying and harassment based on frequently targeted characteristics. We propose the following language:

Bullying means the repeated use by one or more students of a written, verbal or electronic communication or a physical act or gesture, including but not limited to a communication or gesture based on any actual or perceived characteristic, such as race, color, religion, ancestry, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, or a mental, physical or sensory disability, or by any other distinguishing characteristic or association with a person or group with one or more of the abovementioned actual or perceived characteristics, ...

1. Enumeration protects ALL students. The strength of an enumerated law is that it underscores that those students who research shows are most likely to be bullied and harassed and least likely to be protected by non-enumerated anti-bullying and harassment laws and policies are in fact protected, as well as ALL other students. Furthermore, our research shows that students who live in states or school districts with enumerated laws and policies are provided greater protections across the board.ⁱ

2. Students who attend schools with policies that enumerate categories report less bullying and harassment than students who do not. In fact, LGBT students in states without enumeration have the same experience of bullying as students who live in states without any anti-bullying and harassment laws.ⁱⁱ

3. Enumeration is essential if laws are to be implemented. The Supreme Court of the United States noted in *Romer v. Evans* that “enumeration is the essential device used to make the duty not to discriminate concrete and to provide guidance for those who must comply.” Enumeration gives teachers and other educators the tools they need to implement anti-bullying and harassment policies, which makes it easier for them to intervene to prevent bullying. Students reported that teachers were significantly more likely to intervene always or most of the time in states with enumerated policies, as compared to states with either non-enumerated policies or no policies at all.ⁱⁱⁱ

4. Enumeration that includes sexual orientation and gender identity removes all doubt that LGBT youth are protected from bullying and harassment. Evidence shows that school officials often do not recognize that anti-LGBT harassment and discrimination are unacceptable behaviors, or do not respond to the problem due to prejudice or community pressure without the cover of a specific law or policy.^{iv}

5. Comprehensive policies with enumeration help ensure safety and reduce absenteeism. Students from schools with an enumerated policy are 50% more likely to feel very safe at school. Students without such a policy are three times more likely to skip a class because they feel uncomfortable or unsafe.^v

We urge you to add enumeration to ensure this bill provides meaningful protection to ALL of Connecticut's students. Thank you for your time, and for your leadership on the important issue of school safety. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

ⁱ Harris Interactive and GLSEN (2005). *From Teasing to Torment: School Climate in America, A Survey of Students and Teachers*. New York: GLSEN.

ⁱⁱ Kosciw, J. G., Diaz, E. M. and Greytak, E.A. (2008). *The 2007 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN.

ⁱⁱⁱ Harris Interactive and GLSEN.

^{iv} Id.

^v Id.